

SKANDA PURĀṆA

BOOK I: MĀHEŚVARAKHAṆḌA

SECTION I: KEDĀRAKHAṆḌA

CHAPTER ONE

Dakṣa's Insolence

Obeisance to Śrī Gaṇeśa. Om, obeisance to Lord Vāsudeva. Om. After bowing down to Nārāyaṇa¹ as well as to (Sage) Nara,² the most excellent one among men, and to goddess Sarasvatī (the goddess of learning), one should narrate the *Jaya*.³

1. *Nārāyaṇa*—It is significant that a Purāṇa specifically compiled for the glorification of Śiva begins with an obeisance to Nārāyaṇa.

Etymologically 'Nārāyaṇa' means 'one whose abode is waters' (Manu 1.10, Mbh, *Śānti* 328, 25). But Purāṇa-writers ascribed a number of meanings to *Nāra*, e.g. in the *Brahma-Vaivarta Purāṇa* it means 'a form of liberation called *Sārūpya*', 'final beatitude' (*Mokṣa*), 'sins committed'. Thus Nārāyaṇa=Destroyer of sins.

In early Viṣṇuism, Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa are not identical. The Vedic god Viṣṇu was later amalgamated with Nārāyaṇa of the *Pañcarātra* system. See J. Gonda, *Aspects of Early Visnuism*; G.V. Tagare, Intro. to BhP, pp. XIII-XIV).

2. *Nara*=An incarnation of Viṣṇu, the son of Dharma and Mūrti, a daughter of Dakṣa; a permanent companion of Nārāyaṇa while performing penance at Badarikāśrama. They are supposed to have incarnated as Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in Dvāpara Age.

3. *Jaya*—Originally this epithet was restricted to the *Itihāsa* called Mahābhārata (Mbh, *Udyoga* 136.18; *Svargārohaṇika* 5.51). Later some Purāṇas like BdP (III. iv. 4.47-54), VāP (II.41.48-51) claimed the epithet '*Itihāsa*' to themselves. Some Purāṇas like BhP I.2.4, VāPI.1.1 adopted the verse *Nārāyaṇaṁ namaskṛtya* etc. along with the epithet *Jaya*. *Kalpataru* (*Brahmacāri-Khaṇḍa*, p. 25) on the strength of *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* states that the appellation *Jaya* is applied to 18 Purāṇas, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* and *Manu-smṛti*. Hence our Purāṇa is justified in adopting the epithet *Jaya*.

*Vyāsa*¹ said:

1. Obeisance to that Lord, the wielder of Pināka bow, at whose bidding Viriñci (Brahmā) creates the universe, Hari (Viṣṇu) protects it and the god named Kālarudra annihilates it.

2. There, in the Naimiṣa² forest which is the holiest among all holy places and sacred-most among all the sacred spots (in the world), ascetics with Śaunaka³ as their leader—ascetics who were (usual) performers of sacrifices and whose minds were (always) inclined towards holy rites, started a sacrifice of a long duration.

3. The excessively (highly) intelligent disciple of Vyāsa, an ascetic of great austerities, named Lomaśa⁴, came there with an ardent desire to see them.

4. As soon as they saw him coming, all the sages engaged in that sacrifice of long duration, stood up simultaneously with great eagerness to receive him, with materials of worship in their hands.

5. After offering him water for washing his feet and presenting him respectfully materials of worship the sinless sages receive-

1. *Vyāsa*—Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana, the son of Satyawatī and Parāśara, out of wedlock. He was dark in complexion and was brought up in an islet in the river Yamunā by Satyawatī (Mbh, *Ādi* 63.86). His great achievement was the arrangement of the floating Vedic *Mantras* into *Saṁhitās*. Hence he came to be known as *Vyāsa* ('The Arranger'). Purāṇas use *Vyāsa* as a title and state that in every Dvāpara Yuga, there is born a *Vyāsa* whose job is to arrange the Vedic *Mantras* and there have been 28 *Vyāsas* (VP III.3; KP I.52.1-11; VāP II.23.107-213; BḍP I.ii. 35.116-126). Some Purāṇas, however, give less than 28 *Vyāsas* (e.g. KP) while some give more than 28 (e.g. BḍP).

2. *Naimiṣa forest*—The ancient site at modern Nimsar at a distance of 20 miles from Sitapur and 45 miles northwest of Lucknow.

3. *Śaunaka*—Name of various authors of important works like *Rgveda-prātiśākhya*, *Bṛhad-devatā*. One is identified with the Vedic Seer Gṛtsamada. Mbh states that the Śaunaka at whose sacrificial session Mbh was recited by the Sūta Ugrasravas belonged to the Bhṛgu clan (*Ādi* 1.19) and was the son of Śunaka (*Anuśāsana* 30.65).

Purāṇa-writers have adopted him as the listener of their Purāṇas.

4. *Lomaśa*—A sage from the North who associated closely with Pāṇḍavas during their long stay in forest and narrated ancient legends and importance of sacred places etc. to them (Mbh, *Vana*, *Anuśāsana*). But Mbh does not regard him as the disciple of Vyāsa as claimed by the SkP here. Our Purāṇa-writer substituted him for the usual Sūta due to Lomaśa's story telling throughout Mbh, *Vana* and automatically Sūta's discipleship of Vyāsa was attributed to him.

ed him with due hospitality. The sages of exalted nobility then asked him to explain in detail *Śivadharmā* (pious activities pertaining to Śiva).

The sages said:

6. Recount, O sage of extraordinary intellect, the greatness of the Trident-bearing Lord of Devas. O exalted one, describe everything along with the modes of meditation and worship.

7-11. What is the benefit in sweeping (the temple premises)? What is the benefit in making (mystic diagrams) of various colours, in making gifts of mirror, chowries etc. (or in offering these to Śiva), in constructing canopies as well as fountains? What will be the benefit in offering lamps? What will be the fruit of the worship? What are the meritorious results in worshipping Śiva? Men read and recite the *Itihāsas* and *Purāṇas* in front of the idol of Śiva. They study (recite) the *Vedas* in front of him, and make others do the same. What benefit do those men derive? Let it be mentioned in detail. There is no one else in the world, O sage, more devoted to the narratives about Śiva.

12. On hearing these words of those sages of sanctified souls, the disciple of Vyāsa recounted (to them) the excellent greatness of Śiva.

Lomaśa said:

13. In all the eighteen *Purāṇas*, Śiva is sung about as the greatest (lord). Hence no one is competent to recount the greatness of Śiva (adequately).

14. Heaven and liberation (from *Samsāra*) will be attained by those people who repeatedly utter the two-syllabled name *Śi-va*.¹ Not otherwise.

15. Munificent indeed is Mahādeva (the great god), the lord of Devas, the Supreme Ruler. Since everything has been given by him, he is named *Sarva*.

16-18. Blessed are they, noble-souled are they, who always worship Śiva (or the ever-auspicious god). A person who wishes

1. God's name is regarded as highly efficacious in the *Bhakti*-cult, the roots of which go back to the *Rgveda* (See H.D. Velankara, *Bhakti in the Vedas*, pub. in Kauśika Lectures Series in Marathi).

to cross (the ocean) of worldly existence without Sadāśiva, is indeed foolish and confounded. There is no doubt that he, the hater of Śiva, is a great sinner. It was by him that (*Halāhala*) poison was swallowed, Dakṣa's sacrifice was destroyed, Kāla (god of Death) was burnt down and the king was released.

The sages requested:

19. We are very eager. Recount unto us how the poison was swallowed and how Dakṣa's *Yajña* (sacrifice) was destroyed.

Sūta narrated:

20. Formerly at the instance of Brāhmā Parmeṣṭhin, Dākṣāyaṇī (Dakṣa's daughter) was given (in marriage) to noble-souled Śaṅkara by Dakṣa, O brāhmaṇas.

21-22. Once, by chance, Dakṣa came to the Naimiṣa forest. On arrival, he was duly honoured by the sages as well as by all Suras and Asuras by means of eulogies and obeisances. Mahādeva who was present there, did not stand up nor did he offer any reverential salutation to him. Therefore, Dakṣa became furious and he spoke these words:

23. "Everywhere all the Suras and Asuras as well as excellent brāhmaṇas repeatedly bow down to me with great eagerness. How is it, then, that, like a vicious fellow, this noble-souled one does not pay obeisance to me now. Accompanied by vampires, goblins and others, he is a shameless permanent resident of the cremation ground.

24. Heretics, wicked people and habitual sinners become haughty and arrogant on seeing a brāhmaṇa. Indeed, people like these deserve killing or excommunication by good people. Hence I am intent on cursing him."

25-27. After saying thus that (Dakṣa) of great austerities, became angry and spoke to Rudra these words:

"May these excellent brāhmaṇas listen to these words of mine. It behoves you all to carry out my words. This Rudra is considered by me as banned out of all *Yajñas* because he has gone beyond the *Varṇas* (castes) and has transgressed the discipline of the *Varṇas*."

Nandin, son of Śilāda, became furious on hearing those

words. He promptly said to Dakṣa who had great refulgence but who uttered that curse:

Nandin said:

28-30. Why is my lord Maheśa excluded from *Yajñas*? Merely by remembering him all these *Yajñas* become fruitful. Sacrifice, charitable gift, penance, different kinds of holy spots of pilgrimage—all these became sanctified by his name. Why has he been cursed now? He has been cursed by you foolishly and improperly due to your brāhmaṇical rashness, O evil-minded Dakṣa. It is by the noble-souled Śarva that this universe is protected. How is it that Rudra has been cursed, O sinful base brāhmaṇa?

31. On being rebuked thus by Nandin, Dakṣa, the Prajāpati, became furious and he cursed Nandin:

32-33. “All of you devoted to Rudra have been completely excluded from the Vedas. You are indeed cursed by the followers of the Vedic path and excommunicated by the great sages. You all cling to heretical doctrines. You are out of the pale of refined breeding and good conduct. All these Kāpālikas (followers of the skull-cult) are black-faced and addicted to drinking liquor.”¹

34. Thus the servants of Śiva were then cursed by Dakṣa. Then the infuriated Nandin began to imprecate Dakṣa:

35. “O brāhmaṇa, although we, the servants of Śiva, are good and pious, we have been cursed by you improperly (and unnecessarily) out of your brāhmaṇical rashness. Now I shall curse you.

36-39. Arguing that there is nothing else you all adhere to Vedic doctrines. (But) you are lustful, desirous of heaven, greedy

1. Kāpālikas were then beyond the pale of Vedism (like Jainas and Buddhists). This episode reflects the conflict between orthodox Vedism and heterodox followers of Śiva. The obnoxious practices of Kāpālikas offended orthodox Brahmanism so much so that they were not allowed even to have a look at *Śrāddha* food lest it should get polluted. (Vide Gautama DhS 15.25-28, Manu III.239-42, KP II.22.34-35; also G.V. Tagare's Introductions to BdP and VāP.)

The prejudice against Kāpālikas is found even in classical Sanskrit literature.